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Drunk driving enforcement to increase statewide through Labor Day weekend

Motorists should expect to see more law enforcement officers as more money is given toward overtime to agencies throughout the state as part of a two-week campaign to crackdown on drunk driving.

First Lady Mikey Hoeven, along with the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) and the N.D. Highway Patrol announced the *Drunk Driving. Over the Limit. Under Arrest.* enforcement partnership with approximately 40 agencies statewide to improve safety on North Dakota roads. Increased enforcement efforts will take place Aug. 21 – Sept. 7.

"In 2008, there were 48 alcohol-related fatal crashes, accounting for nearly 50 percent of all fatal car crashes. Of all alcohol-related crashes, about 16 percent involved under-the-age-of-21 drivers," said First Lady Mikey Hoeven. "This is a serious issue for our state and for our youth – the future of North Dakota."

In a 2006 report published by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 97 percent of survey participants said they believe that it is important to some degree for their states to enforce state drinking-and-driving laws more strictly. In the same study, 87 percent of respondents stated that stepped-up enforcement was very important.

"This year, we are allocating \$75,000 toward the law enforcement effort. Last year we spent approximately \$40,000. This year's campaign is focused on engaging communities throughout the state to support law enforcement and their crackdown on drunk driving," NDDOT Director Francis Ziegler said. "People need to take personal responsibility for driving behavior. Driving is a full-time job. Do not drive distracted and designate a sober driver before drinking even one drink."

North Dakota's increased enforcement efforts over the Labor Day period last summer resulted in 816 citations that included 154 DUI citations.

Driving under the influence has a significant impact on the safety of North Dakota roadways. Of the 84 people who died on North Dakota roads as of Aug. 15 of this year, 36 of them were related to alcohol. In 2008, one-half of the fatalities were related to alcohol.

Compared to this time last year, North Dakota's fatality numbers are up by 17, according to Col. James Prochniak, N.D. Highway Patrol superintendent. "Many of this year's vehicle crashes have involved multiple fatalities," he said. "Alcohol-related fatalities are completely preventable deaths. We see firsthand the effects of poor decisions. The risk that you will hurt or kill yourself and others on the road if you drive under the influence is far too great."

"Responsible drivers can take steps toward safety on our roadways by buckling up and choosing not to drink and drive. As uniformed officers are stepping up their crackdown efforts, we need to partner with the public, and together we can make our communities and roadways safer," Prochniak said.